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# Is THIS the Internet?!: The Technological Generation Shift Separating Siblings

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# Is THIS the Internet?!: The Technological Generation Shift Separating Siblings

Posted on **March 1, 2010** by **Editor**



By **Jenn Hernandez**

Isn't it funny how quickly words and phrases fall out of use almost as quickly as the need for them in society does? It's either that, or the harder of the phrases evolve as circumstances change. "Language, like culture, is a dynamic thing. It was an oral thing once, then became a printed thing and is becoming a digital thing": [1] writing letters gave way to electronic mail, creating the term for the former: snail-mail. Soon even e-mail became obsolete in the wake of the instant message. A block of text can now be condensed to a few lines of sometimes-indecipherable abbreviations and acronyms through text messaging. The key word now is *instantaneous*.

As it is a normal cycle of life for all things, generations are separated from those that came before them, and those that come after. Perhaps the generation gap, technologically speaking, should now be called the, "generational shift," says Ning [2] (a social networking site) co-founder and Web browser pioneer Marc Andreessen [3]. "A whole new generation grows up used to new technologies, and they're just different." [4] As for generation gaps usually separating literal generations like parents and children, the new generation shifts only span a few years.

We all have different needs for technology, but they are often influenced by what we grew up with. I, for instance, having grown up reading any book I could find once or twice, found reading from a Kindle to be not as satisfying as reading printed material (though it is definitely more compact). I find the "*electronic paper*" [5] technology, or whatever it is, to be fascinating. In a New York Times article, the author gives a similarly resonant example of the generation shift:

*My 2-year-old daughter surprised me recently with two words: "Daddy's book." She was holding my Kindle electronic reader. Here is a child only beginning to talk, revealing that the seeds of the next generation gap have already been planted. She has identified the Kindle as a substitute for words printed on physical pages. I own the device and am still not completely sold on the idea. [6]*

The article is titled “The Children of Cyberspace: Old Fogies by Their 20s” Hey...I’m in my 20s. Does that mean I’m old? Technologically speaking, I suppose that would be the case.

Kids are growing up fast nowadays. My 8-year-old cousin has a Facebook [7] which she updates literally with what she is doing at the moment, for instance: “Brooklyn is having a conversation with Doug”. Someone should get this kid a Twitter [8]. The truth is probably that this little girl is just as savvy (and will probably become even more so than I or her older sisters are) on the Internet. Don’t get me wrong—I started out a savvy little 5-year-old “gamer” (my specialties were Rodent’s Revenge [9], Reader Rabbit [10], and Minesweeper [11]) and an intrigued encyclopedia CD-rom user. I was on my way.

I still remember my first encounters with the Internet when I was in the second grade. The page I wanted to look at was going to take at least half an hour to load, even without images, on our poorly equipped connection. I decided that it wasn’t really worth it and wondered what the use of the Internet was if it was so slow. Once we actually had a decent connection, I was disappointed to find out that typing a keyword into the AOL [12] keyword search bar didn’t automatically direct me to the page I was hoping to read. (I didn’t even have an idea of what a web page looked like yet. I also thought that AOL was the Internet at the time.) But, instead it returned white pages after pages with line after line of black and blue text: the search results my keyword turned up. I was surprised. *This is the Internet?*

A child of around the same age today might laugh, feel a little bit embarrassed for my naivete, and respond through the time-space continuum (because that’s how everyone communicates in the future), “*Of course this is the Internet.*” Is it just me, or are my 8-year-old ears burning?

So how are internet companies and search engines catering to the knowledge that more and more young people are beginning to use the Internet? This brings into light an article I recently found about how Google [13] is trying to make searches more understandable, given the way a child’s mind works. The article discusses some problems with existing search engines:

*It can be difficult for users to formulate the right keywords to call up their desired results... that task can be even more challenging for children, given that they do not always have the right context for thinking about a new subject. One 12-year-old boy searching for information about Costa Rica used the search term ‘sweaty clothes’ because that was what he associated with the jungle [14].*

Google and many other search engines are incorporating more visuals, which would’ve no doubt benefitted the visual learner I was and still am. (Find out what your learning style is, if you haven’t already figured it out! [15]).

Here is a search I conducted as an example using the keyword “cats” [16]. To try it out for yourself, go to Google.com and start a search. Once you get your results, click on “See Options”. Under “Standard View” you’ll find “Wonder Wheel”. It’s kind of reminiscent of the

brainstorming word webs we used to use in language arts class in elementary school. Remember those?

In an interview with John Carlin [17], he discusses the generation gap, explaining that, unlike with the minority counterculture of the 60s defining the generation gap,

*there is no underground anymore. Everything is on the surface—America survives by absorbing rather than rejecting. This is also why the new generation is so hard to see and also why it is so profound. It takes place in a new social arena that only certain people, notably those who grew up with computers, are aware of. ... The gap is more about what an older generation can't see or value than in what a younger generation creates" [18].*

It's no secret that the Internet is becoming a big part of most of our lives, whether we are the blossoming social network butterfly, or (on perhaps the opposite end of the technology savviness continuum) the grandparent firing up the old dinosaur-of-a-computer to check that darned e-mail for pictures of the grandkids (please excuse my overt use of stereotyping, or ageism, if you prefer). Point illustrated, is it possible to keep up? Of course it is! It takes practice and patience, just like anything does. However, it's not so wrong to be dumbfounded or even a little bit intimidated by technology, or even to employ it for uses "unimagined by marketing departments" [19]. In helping a man at a retirement home use his tape player, and striking up a friendship, Genevieve Zook [20] took, "a lesson from [him], because this may well be how the generations will bridge technology issues. Some will use the technology at hand, ...while yet others will take comfort in the habits of older technologies, unmoved by the latest gadget. Finally, a few... will use any gizmo as a bridge to a human connection. I guess you could say that those folks prefer to socially network in person, which is so 20th century, don't you think?" [21].

## Endnotes

[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/16/world/americas/16iht-currents.html>

[2] <http://www.ning.com/>

[3] <http://www.ibiblio.org/pioneers/andreesen.html>

[4] [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07\\_27/b4041401.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_27/b4041401.htm)

[5] <http://www.amazon.com/Kindle-Amazon-Original-Wireless-generation/dp/B000FI73MA>

[6] <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/10/weekinreview/10stone.html?scp=7&sq=jane%20january%202010&st=cse>

[7] <http://www.facebook.com>

[8] <http://www.twitter.com>

[9] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodent%27s\\_Revenge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodent%27s_Revenge)

[10] <http://www.reader-rabbit.com/>

[11] <http://www.mine-sweeper.com/>

[12] <http://www.aol.com/>

[13] <http://www.google.com/>

[14] <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/26/technology/internet/26kidsearch.html?fta=y>

[15] <http://www.learning-styles-online.com/inventory/>

[16] <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&hs=PDQ&tbo=1&output=search&q=cats&tbs=ww:1&ei=-Id5S4flF4SAswP0gNHKCA&sa=X&oi=tool&resnum=2&ct=link&ved=0CCQQpwU>

[17] John Carlin, of Funny Garbage

[18] [<http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm/the-new-generation-gap>]

[19] <http://www.llrx.com/features/generationgap.htm>

[20] <http://www.llrx.com/authors/1119>

[21] <http://www.llrx.com/features/generationgap.htm>

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